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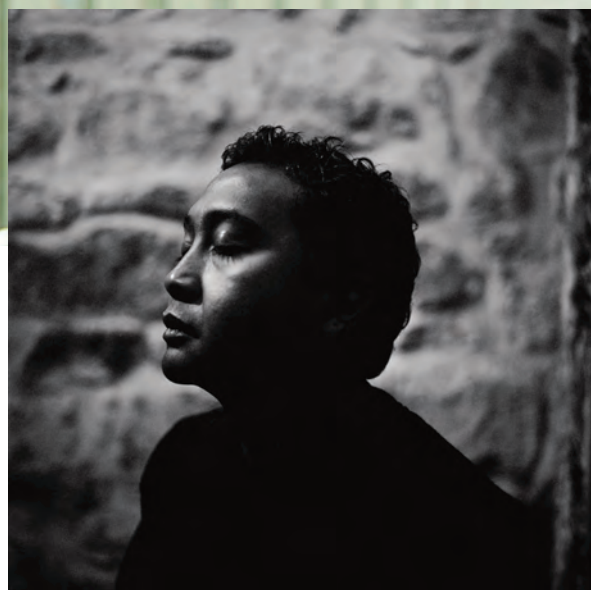


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AN ARTIST & CURATOR FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Joël Andrianomearisoa: Serenade is Not Dead marks Laurie Ann Farrell's curatorial debut at Dallas Contemporary.

BY CHRIS BYRNE



Above: Laurie Ann Farrell is the senior curator at Dallas Contemporary. Photograph by Chia Chong. Far left: Joël Andrianomearisoa. Photograph by Christian Senna. Left: Joël Andrianomearisoa, *Serenade is Not Dead*, installation view. Photograph by Kevin Todora. Courtesy of the artist and Sabrina Amrani Madrid.

Prior to arriving in Dallas, Laurie Ann Farrell was the head of modern and contemporary art and the curator of contemporary art at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Before that she oversaw the galleries at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Georgia, which also included the exhibition spaces in Atlanta, southern France, and Hong Kong. As the new senior curator of Dallas Contemporary, Farrell discusses her first exhibition and the highlights from her emerging curatorial career.

Chris Byrne (CB): *Joël Andrianomearisoa's Serenade is Not Dead opened this past month at Dallas Contemporary. The show marks the artist's first museum exhibition in the US as well as your curatorial debut at the institution—how did all this come about?*

Laurie Ann Farrell (LAF): I first discovered Joël's work in the 1997 issue of *Revue Noire*, dedicated to Madagascar. His career was in the nascent days at this point, but you could see that something very special was developing.

In 2014, I was completely spellbound by his *Sentimental Negotiations* installation of pocket mirrors in the *Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists* at the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt am Main. I subsequently brought the *Divine Comedy* exhibition to the SCAD in Savannah, and this afforded the amazing opportunity to spend more time with Joël and

garner a greater understanding of his artistic practice.

When I arrived at Dallas Contemporary, I wanted to revisit Joël's work, as I believe he exemplifies the artist of the 21st century by working across a diverse range of media and methods to express his creative vision. I knew our viewers would connect with the artist's visual explorations of love and longing or "territories of desire" through abstraction, his references to the figure, conceptual appropriation, and photography. This show was the first in a series of forthcoming solo exhibitions featuring contemporary artists from Africa and the Diaspora.

CB: *What would you consider to be the curatorial highlights or noteworthy programming initiatives at SCAD?*

LAF: Overseeing the exhibition program at SCAD's international locations really allowed me to explore a broad range of artists and designers. One of the many once-in-a-lifetime experiences was working on the 85,000-square-foot expansion of the SCAD Museum, which opened in 2011.

Another major highlight includes bringing Carrie Mae Weems in as a distinguished visiting faculty member in 2008 to teach a multidisciplinary course geared towards producing a film and related series of photographs. The film, *Constructing History: A Requiem to Mark the Moment*, was a cinematic recreation of significant civil rights moments from 1968 bookended by images of the 2008 Democratic



Joël Andrianomearisoa, *VESTIGES*, installation, flowers, 2018–2020. Photograph by Kevin Todora. Courtesy of the artist and Sabrina Amrani Madrid.

presidential contenders President Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Students who participated in making props and costumes also acted in the film. It was incredibly rewarding to hear students say that working with Carrie Mae Weems had changed their lives and redefined for them what it means to be an artist.

I also worked closely with André Leon Talley, a former SCAD trustee, on numerous fashion exhibitions. The most ambitious show we realized together was the *Little Black Dress* exhibition that opened at the SCAD Museum in Savannah and later traveled to Paris. I really loved working with Talley, as he's a fashion connoisseur with an indexical knowledge of fashion history.

Another unexpected career highlight includes collaborating with André Benjamin, aka André 3000, on a film and exhibition of bespoke jumpsuits he designed for the 2014 Outkast reunion tour. We opened the *I Feel Ya* show in Miami and then brought it to Savannah.

CB: *You were at the Detroit Institute of Arts. I currently serve on the board of directors at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, cofounded by Julie Reyes Taubman. The network of museums in the Detroit area offers an incredible range and includes MOCAD, the Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills, the University*

of Michigan Museum of Art in Ann Arbor, as well as the DIA. I'm wondering if you feel any similarities exist within these museum structures and the new context of Dallas and Fort Worth.


LAF: In the short period of time that I've been working in Dallas, the thing that really stands out is the curatorial collegiality across the DFW-area museums. For example, a group of women curators from museums in Dallas and Fort Worth gather for dinner about every six to eight weeks. These amazing colleagues also show up at each other's openings and offer a great deal of genuine support. To have such a tight-knit community of curators is fairly rare and incredibly special.


CB: *And you're currently in London working with Vivienne Westwood on a major exhibition that will open on March 28, the evening of Dallas Contemporary's annual gala....*

LAF: Yes—this timely exhibition focuses on Vivienne Westwood's fusion of fashion and art through the lens of her environmental activism. The exhibition will showcase fashion, graphics, photography, film, and other ephemera illustrating Westwood's environmental campaigns such as Save the Rainforest, Save the Arctic, and her Ethical Fashion Initiative in Kenya. **P**

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